

EXCERPT  
of  
CHILDREN OF THE GODS  
by  
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This excerpt has been redacted

[...] nothing compared with this total absence of sound, so eerily complete that she could hear the pounding of her own pulse in her ears.

Disconcerted, she reached out in the darkness. The other side of the bed was empty. Far off in the distance a plover cried, the lonely sound feeding her sense of dread.

[...]

Turning on the bedside lamp, she rubbed her eyes and glanced around the room. The clothes he had left on the chair were gone. She clambered out of bed, the disorientation of sudden wakefulness upsetting her balance. Grabbing the bedpost, she tried to steady herself with shaking hands.

Her bathrobe hung behind the door and she slipped it over her naked body, tying the cord and slipping her feet into her loafers, the leather cold against her toes. Letting herself out onto the landing, she was relieved to see soft light illuminating the passage and the staircase. Groping for a light-switch in the dark would not have been pleasant. She edged silently down the stairs. *Why am I tiptoeing? There's nobody else in the house.*

The front door was ajar. She pushed it open and stood on the veranda, scanning the darkness, trying to recall the location of the outbuildings. Gradually, her eyes adjusted, and she detected a pale glow to the left of the house. It had to be the barn. She moved slowly towards it, feeling her way, worried she might trip over some unseen obstacle.

Wide awake now, her mind churned through the possibilities. What was he doing there? What if he hurts himself? The insidious little voice whispered, *What if he hurts you?*

Senses heightened by anxiety, she jumped as an owl hooted in the topmost branches of a tree. In the distance, a cow complained and another answered. Nearby, something rustled in the shrubbery. The darkness was alive with the nocturnal scurrings of small creatures going about their nightly business; predator and prey alike, surviving as best they could. She shivered in the thin gown, pulling it tightly about her body.

The pungency of damp earth and crushed grass rose beneath her feet, and her shoes, soaked by dew, made soft, squelching sounds as she as she crept towards the barn door. It was partly open, and as she approached, she could see a hurricane lantern on the ground, its pale, flickering light the glow she had observed from the house.

Silently, she edged inside. He was kneeling several metres away with his back to her, his breathing hoarse and laboured. She cast a swift glance around the interior of the building and was relieved to find it otherwise empty: no stallion dozing in the stalls, no massive bull

tethered to the stall post. At least he had been spared those reminders.

Not wishing to alarm him, Addie cleared her throat softly. He didn't turn....but climbed slowly to his feet. Her heart pounded as he turned towards her. Her fear made time dilate – every movement of his large frame slow and dreamlike. Their gaze met and held. There was no recognition in his eyes and his face was a mask of pain.

[...]

His eyes, glazed and slightly unfocused, never wavered from her face; his mouth framed silent words. As she watched, a slow rivulet of blood began to trickle from his nose and drip from his chin, but he made no move to stem the flow.

Then, without warning, he jerked into life and began to shamble towards her. His movements were uncoordinated, and he staggered, as though his joints had rusted for want of use.

For one terrible moment, he reminded her of Frankenstein's monster, a damaged creature cobbled together out of bits of humanity, galvanised into action by the power of a human voice. Pity and fear mingled as she watched him: an almost dehumanized figure somehow epitomizing human suffering

Every instinct warned her to run, but before she could reach the door [...]

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